



Mixed Office Design Manual

Harford County, Maryland

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Approved by policy:

Prepared by:

**Harford County
Department of Planning and Zoning**

Planning and Zoning
DEPARTMENTAL POLICY #15-004
Design Standards: Mixed Office Design Manual

The Department of Planning and Zoning will develop and maintain a design manual (Manual) to be used in evaluating projects proposed in Mixed Office (MO) districts. The Manual will contain general guidance on site plan and building design with the intent of achieving signature, integrated mixed-use projects featuring and centered on public spaces and amenities. Specific project elements addressed in the Manual will include, but not be limited to, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, landscaping and buffering, location of mechanical or service equipment, internal circulation of vehicles, lighting standards, signage standards, articulation of building facades, use of windows and other architectural design elements, building material choices, and the location of building entrances.


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Date

Use of the Mixed Office Design Manual

The Harford County Mixed Office Design Manual has been created for planners, engineers and developers seeking to develop a specific site with the Mixed Office (MO) zoning designation.

Objectives

This manual outlines standards for the design of buildings, infrastructure, and landscaping as well as overall site layout in the MO district. Standards will apply to new development and redevelopment in the MO district and are intended to encourage functional pedestrian-oriented, walkable projects with an integrated mixture of corporate offices, retail, recreation, services and residences.

Plan Submission Requirements

Plans submitted to the Department of Planning and Zoning shall include items specified on the most recent Development Review checklist(s). In addition, the applicant shall provide renderings of the overall proposed site layout, designated open space, public amenities, and building facades.

Design Principles

Mixed Office development should achieve:

- A. Create signature neighborhood centers that integrate a mix of uses, feature centrally located public spaces, and function as a cohesive community.
- B. Configure development to have a recognizable pattern of blocks and interconnected streets.
- C. Orient buildings along roadways and amenity areas to activate the public realm.
- D. Utilize principles of 'Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design' (CPTED).

Site Design

Buildings should be sited so that the character of existing topography and site features are enhanced; the location of structures and other site improvements should create a pedestrian-oriented environment with safe, convenient, and accessible pedestrian routes to public sidewalks, transit facilities, and adjacent uses. Site planning shall adhere to the following design standards:

- A. Provide pedestrian connections from buildings to public walkways and between buildings to buffer pedestrians from vehicle circulation areas.
- B. Retail buildings should be centrally located to create pedestrian gathering places which are of a sufficient size and scale to buffer the pedestrian areas from traffic.
- C. Buildings should be oriented to promote views into and through each public space.
- D. All sides of a structure that directly face an adjacent public or private road shall feature at least one (1) customer entrance. Structures fronting two (2) roads may opt for one (1) corner entrance directly accessible from either frontage. Where a structure directly faces more than two (2) adjacent public or private

roads, this standard shall apply to only two (2) sides of the building, including the side of the building facing the primary road, and another side of the building facing a secondary street.

- E. Designated public space and site amenities shall be provided and integrated into the overall site plan. To the maximum practical extent, the public space should be designed as a focal point for the entire development. These spaces shall be centrally located and form elements of commonality, which help to establish the identity of an area and provide year round use and interest to its users. Individual site amenities within an area should have common features, such as color, material, and design to provide a cohesive environment and identifiable character. These spaces should be suitable for public gatherings and readily accessible to the residents and users of the development. The landscaping plan shall detail the proposed public space and catalog outdoor furniture such as planters and benches. Examples of public spaces and site amenities may include, but are not limited to:
 - Public plazas;
 - Green squares;
 - Urban Gardens;
 - Covered Colonnades;
 - Sidewalk Dining;
 - Pedestrian Alleys and Walkways;
 - Fountains; or
 - Amphitheaters and terraced seating.
- F. Retail and residential uses shall be integrated and oriented toward the designated public space.
- G. Parking should be located to the side or rear of structures where possible.
- H. Internal circulation should include well-defined pedestrian networks and allow for the safe and efficient movement of motorized and non-motorized traffic. Pedestrian and vehicular connections shall be made to surrounding development. The site design should reduce focus on the automobile by:
 - 1. Promoting safety for people walking and using cars, transit and bicycles.
 - 2. Encourage streetscape improvements such as sidewalks, street trees, landscaping, site furnishings and other amenities that reduce conflict between pedestrians and automotive traffic.
 - 3. Limit the impact of drive aisles and service roads on pedestrian circulation and safety.

Parking:

The site design must provide direct connections and safe street crossings to internal project uses as well as existing and proposed multi-modal transportation facilities.

- A. Reductions of parking through the use of shared parking areas within the development are encouraged. Minimize parking as a visual element of the site and enhance the pedestrian environment.
- B. All parking areas must be effectively buffered from adjacent roadways and adjoining residential areas, through the use of berms, planting or the depression of parking areas below surrounding grades. The use of landscaping shall also be incorporated and included for all residential parking areas.
- C. Landscaped islands (no less than eight (8'-0") in width) shall be distributed throughout the parking areas.
- D. Trash receptacles should be provided throughout the parking lot(s), and should not be limited to building entrance(s).
- E. Sidewalks and landscaped aisles shall be incorporated into the parking areas to facilitate the flow of pedestrians from the parking lot to the building in a safe and efficient manner.
- F. Pedestrian crossing areas shall be designed and constructed utilizing textured materials or other visual cues. To the maximum extent feasible, pedestrians and vehicles shall be separated through provisions of a walkway. Where complete separation of pedestrians and vehicles is not feasible, the following types of features shall be provided:
 - 1. Change in paving surface materials such as low maintenance pavers, bricks and stamped/stained/scored concrete;
 - 2. The use of landscaping, bollards, lighting and other means to clearly delineate pedestrian areas; and/or
 - 3. The use of signage clearly identifying pedestrian crossing areas.

Lighting:

All exterior lighting shall be appropriately scaled and directed to avoid adverse impact and light spillover onto adjacent properties.

- A. All exterior lighting shall utilize cutoff shields or otherwise be designed to conceal the light source from adjoining properties and roads. Upward directed lighting shall be prohibited. Lighting levels at the property line shall not exceed (0.5-1.0) foot-candles.
- B. Decorative lighting fixtures shall be required in public areas and shall be compatible with the related structures and surrounding development.
- C. The maximum height of light poles in parking lots shall not exceed 18'-0" in height.
- D. Pedestrian scale lighting shall be incorporated in designated public spaces.

Signage:

Freestanding signage shall be constructed in an unobtrusive manner which compliments the architectural elements of quality, style, color and materials of the building(s). Signage shall conform to the Harford County Code, Section 267-33(as amended).

Loading, service areas, and utilities:

Service areas should be visually unobtrusive and integrated with the project site design and architecture. The following requirements apply to the location and design of such areas:

- A. Service entrances, loading docks, utility structures and waste disposal areas shall be fully screened from residential areas, public roads, pedestrian gathering areas and primary entrances with fencing, walls and/or landscaping.
- B. Screening elements shall be composed of materials consistent with the primary building. Prefabricated vinyl fences shall not be permitted as a screening material. Screen walls and fences over ten (10) feet in length shall be bordered by a four-foot-wide landscape buffer.
- C. Coordinate the location of service areas with adjacent development, so that shared service drives may be feasible.
- D. Service areas shall not be readily visible from adjacent buildings. Wherever possible, exterior utility boxes and above-ground utility installations shall be located to the side or rear of buildings, and not visible from the street.

Building Design Standards:

Buildings shall have distinct architectural features and patterns that provide visual interest, and incorporate design elements that reflect the pedestrian scale.

Buildings should relate to the terrain and each other in their massing and forms. Square “box-like” structures with large, blank, unarticulated wall surfaces are not an acceptable form. Facades with a high level of visual interest from vehicle and pedestrian views are encouraged. Buildings should have features and patterns that provide visual interest at the scale of the pedestrian, that reduce apparent mass, and that relate to local architectural character.

Massing is the volumetric design, or three dimensional space in which a building occupies. In simplest terms it is the three dimensional form of the building. Architectural massing is important to the overall design in that the building form can have the biggest impact on the character of the development. Large commercial structures have a different form and massing than smaller residential structures. For this reason it is important to suggest ways to lessen the impact of building form. Proposed buildings with greater facade width facing the street may appear to be out of scale with adjacent residential development.

Buildings can be articulated to create interest, harmony and scale within their architecture. In certain cases, relief from this design element can be given if the roof massing can be articulated and be inspired by building forms found in the surrounding area.

- A. Facades should be articulated in the horizontal and vertical planes. Facades greater than 100'-0" feet in length; measured horizontally, shall incorporate wall plane projections or recesses shall include a change in wall plane of the façade every 50'-0" feet.
- B. Facades that face public roads shall have arcades, display windows, entry areas, awnings or other such architectural features. Windows shall be scaled proportionately to the wall plane within which they are located. Windows on public walkways should be at a height that enables pedestrians to easily view retail products and services within the building.
- C. Building facades shall include a pattern that includes a combination of the following elements:

Material change;

Texture Change; or

A specific architectural element proposed by the applicant's architect that is acceptable to the Department of Planning and Zoning.

All design elements shall remain harmonious to the overall project.

- D. Parapets, gable roofs, hip roofs or dormers may be used to conceal flat roofs and roof top equipment from public view. Screening elements shall be composed of forms, materials, and colors that are compatible with the architectural qualities of the building, including materials, scale, form, and color. Alternating lengths and roof designs, including specific architectural elements, may be acceptable at the discretion of the Director.

- E. Exterior building finishes shall use quality material(s); including, but not limited to brick, stone and textured concrete masonry units. Exterior insulated finish systems (EIFS) shall be allowed only as an accent material. Exterior building materials shall not include painted concrete block, tilt-up concrete panels, or prefabricated steel panels.
- F. Each retail establishment shall have clearly defined, highly visible customer entrances. Multiple exterior customer entrances, including corner entrances, shall be oriented toward the public space amenities and should be incorporated into the overall project design. Large, single-tenant commercial structures shall be designed so as to facilitate and not inhibit the activation of sidewalks and frontages; such buildings may take advantage of terrain or other design solutions in order to achieve these objectives.

Some of the following architectural features shall be integrated into the building design to identify entrances or otherwise facilitate building articulation:

- Canopies or porticos;
- Overhangs;
- Recesses;
- Arcades;
- Raised cornice parapets over the door;
- Peaked roof forms;
- Arches;
- Outdoor patios; and
- Display Windows.

- G. Buildings should be designed to be flexible to accommodate changes in tenants or uses over time. Highly specialized buildings suitable for a single tenant are discouraged.
- H. Wall mounted signage shall be constructed in an unobtrusive manner which compliments the architectural elements of quality, style, color and materials of the building(s). Signage shall conform to the Harford County Code, Section 267-33(as amended).